Reinventing Democracy in a Postcolonial State: E-Democracy and the National Assembly in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study adopts the concept of reinventing democracy to refocus attention on the theoretical framework of postcoloniality (in the humanities and social sciences). The study further highlights the eminent position of e-democracy in the current formations for moving contemporary society forward. In examining these issues, a case-study of the National Assembly in Nigeria has been made. We found that in this country, there seems to exist a sacrosanct brand of legislative institutionalism, which contradicts the current global revolution in information and communications technology (ICT). In the process, some level of immobility is introduced to critically desired service delivery in the country and attempts are made by the people's representatives (of all people) to turn the nation into a colony of mere patriotic listeners. The study concludes that the postcolony must not convert to such a society of the underclass. A complementary concept of e-democracy is e-government. Further embedded in e-government are the dual components of e-readiness and e-participation. We found that this nation's National Assembly appears to be deficient in e-readiness. The legislative body seems distrusful of e-participation. The study finally recommends that the rights of the citizens under e-democracy must be safeguarded by the central lawmakers, as it would guarantee the crucially expected reinvention of democracy, in such democracy-needy nation-states.

*Keywords***:** Democracy; Reinventing Democracy; Postcolonial State; E-Democracy; National Assembly; Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy has become the flagship of modern paradigms of governance, despite some current misgivings. Consequently, in its ideal framing democracy is imbued with the character of providing the ultimate bridging, in a certain divide between the societal upper class and the subaltern components of the social order. It (democracy) guarantees participatory hope for the otherwise voiceless members of society. In its electoral form, it provides for some to be electors through whom (invariably) representatives emerge. Democracy therefore presupposes the continuity of intercourse between the elected and the unelected. Effectual communication between elected officials and their constituents is consequently, irrefutably critical to the success of present-day democracies. Hence, the ostensible democracy has become completely anachronistic. The internet alone has the latent capacity to bring down such a democratic pretension. Thus, to what extent is the postcolonial state, which is grappling with its subsisting, colonialism-induced contradictions, equally conversant with these current democratic realities, particularly the legislative component of the elected officials in such post-colonies? Therefore, the problem of this study derives essentially from the incidence of a bill, recently brought before the Nigerian Senate, entitled A Bill for an Act to Prohibit Frivolous Petitions and other Matters Connected Therewith, which came to public knowledge in December 2015.

The proposed Nigerian legislation provides for an option of N4 million (Nigerian currency) for individuals found guilty of false newspaper, radio and television publications and N2 million for disseminators of false phone text messages or communications on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or WhatsApp. The Bill also proposes to punish malicious intent to harm the reputation of a person or set the public against individuals or group of individuals or institutions of government. In further specificity on the social media, the bill intends that where any person, through text message, tweets, whatsapp or any social media, posts any abusive statement, knowing same to be false, that person shall be guilty of an offence. Upon conviction, the person shall be liable to an imprisonment for two years or a fine of N2.0 million or both fine and imprisonment [1].

Indeed, whatever were the intensions of the sponsors of the bill; the Nigerian voters squarely saw the intended law as an anti-social media bill and promptly mobilized for a confrontation with the nation's Senate. According to a Nigerian civil rights advocacy group, Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP):

> Rather than increasing universal and inclusive access to the Internet for all Nigerians, the National Assembly of Nigeria was working to undermine access of citizens to the Internet. Yet, freedom of expression entails the ability to both speak and receive information, including through the social media and other generated content services such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and chat applications. And by initiating the bill, the National Assembly was impermissibly restricting the ability of the citizens to use these tools to communicate, connect, and seek independent sources of information [1].

We highlight that the Nigerian National Assembly as a bicameral body is fully involved in the attendant altercation because, constitutionally, bills originating from either chamber of the Assembly (the Senate or the House of Representatives) also go to the other arm of the

national legislature, for consent or rejection. And in historical contexts, the incidence of rejection has never been witnessed in the Nigeria (presidential) parliament [2].

Colonial Nigeria became independent from Great Britain in October 1960. Earlier in 1914, the imperial invaders had amalgamated the disparate protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria (to obtain what is currently known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria). The Nigerian federation therefore is completely a colonial creation. Moreover, it is a curious fusion of inumerable ethnic nationalities with the then Northern group of nations fundamentally different in cultural, social and political backgrounds from their Southern counterparts. According to Carl LeVan [3] the north and south (of Nigeria) had little in common when the British brought them together in 1914. (They still possess very little in common). Furthermore, one of the Nigerian founding fathers of the current Nigerian nation, Sir Ahmadu Bello, later referred to the amalgamation as 'the mistake of 1914' [4]. By several standard measures therefore, Nigeria is an incredibly diverse country, as several data sets counting ethnic groups, consider it among the most heterogeneous nations in the world [3]. Democracy is accordingly also interpretable in the country as a struggle for ethnic supremacy or a clamour for ethnic relevance. Thus, in the ethnic equation of politics in the country, the citizenship factor and the voter's voice remain secondary subject matters.

The system of government that the departing colonizers devised for the new state of Nigeria was the parliamentary system of government, which entailed a formal opposition party in parliament. The political parties in the system operated along ethnic trajectories and politics in the country became an issue of unending opposition. By January 1966, some extremist elements in the Nigerian Military decided to disband the government of the newly independent nation, through a bloody coup d'etat. The coup was invariably interpreted along ethnic lines. Consequently, a counter coup of inter-ethnic dimension follwed in July 1966. The three major ethnic groups in the highly heterogeneous country are the Hausa/Fulani, the Yorubas and the Igbos. The coups and countercoups principally pited the Igbos of South-East Nigeria against the Northern Hausa/Fulani. It subsequently led to the progrom-like massacre of the humongously migrant Igbos in Northern Nigeria.

Under the leadership of the Military Governor of the country's Eastern Region (Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu) the now endangered Igbos made an attempt to break away from the Nigerian federation (in inevitable reaction to the progrom). But the remaining Nigeria would take none of such combatant audacity. Hence, under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon as Nigerian Head of State, a civil war ensued, between the majority Igbos and other minorities in Eastern Nigeria (now renamed the Federal Republic of Biafra) on one hand and the rest of Nigeria on the other side. This war was fought between July 1967 and January 1970 when the Biafrans surrendered. The soldiers remained in power in the country while intermitently pretending they had handed over to civilians (whom they would subsequently putch aside). The army at this period also indulged in counter-coups against the military governments that emerged under these scenarios and this continued to entail the execution of the coup plotters (according to the soldiers' maximum judgements). It was only in May 1999 that it seemed the Nigerian soldiers have finally ceded powers of governance to Nigerian civilians, with a presidential system of government in place. This system of government features a Senate and the House of Representatives as the dual chambers of a National Assembly, the co-variable of this reserach.

It is against this background that the paper sets out to interrogate the issue of reinventing democracy in a postcolonial (African) state: e-democracy and the National

Assembly in Nigeria. The general objective of the study is to examine the attitude of a national legislative body to e-democracy and the influence of this attitude on the imperatives of reinventing democracy in a democracy-needy country. We have adopted as methodology for the study, the critical mode of research.

2. CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATIONS

2. 1. Reinventing Democracy

The concept of reinventing democracy has a subsisting similitude of reinventing government. Commenting on the latter, Osborne [5] posits that reinvention is a large-scale combat and it requires intense, prolonged struggle in the political arena, in the institutions of government, and in the community and society. In addition, that given the enormity of the task and the resistance that must be overcome, the reinventor's challenge is to leverage small resources into big changes [5]. In our context, the expected reinventor happens to be a binary of the elector and the elected. Thus, reinvention becomes a critical collectivism (because democracy is involved). Democracy is easily understood as a government of the people. Invariably, people are not subject to reinvention as machinery for factory production. But the essence of democracy is in its processes. And central to these processes is the issue of representation. Democracy also invokes the notion of collectivism. But in modern democracies, the absolute type of collectivism has become untenable, necessitating the embrace of only the functional brand of collectivism that may be located in the legislature (as representatives of the people). Furthermore, modern democracies possess as features, an internationalized nuance of citizens' rights and freedoms. The erstwhile concept of ordinary citizen has consequently become debatable. Hence, reinventing democracy refers to that critical collectivism required to keep democracy abreast with the challenges of seamless representation, in an age of increasingly internationalized awareness of their democratic rights, by the subaltern members of society.

2. 2. Postcolonial State

According to McClintock [6]: without a renewed will to intervene in the unacceptable, we face being becalmed in a historically empty space in which our sole direction is found by gazing back, spellbound, at the epoch behind us, in a perpetual present marked only as *post*. It was the summary of his critique of the then orthodoxy of post-colonialism and its nuances. Shohat [7] has also highlighted what he termed some of the theoretical and political ambiguities of *the post-colonial*. He accuses the conceptualization of slippery political significations, which occasionally escape the clearly oppositional intentions of its theoretical practitioners. He (Shohat) further contends that despite its dizzying multiplicity of positionalities, postcolonial theory has curiously not addressed the politics of location of the very term "post-colonial." We reckon with these suppositions. In this study however, the postcolonial does not border on such oppositions (as conceived in Shohat [7]). Furthermore, we are not fundamentally gazing back and we do not equally subscribe to the eliding of the historical actuality of colonialism, so we would not be accused of being held spellbound by such realities. The present that we characterize is not also perpetual. It only possesses perturbations that pose serious challenges to representatives of the people.

The *post* in this context therefore demarcates an epoch from its new trajectory. It recognizes the enduring reality of an ignoble era marked by colonialism and reflections on the undesirability of any semblances of its retrogressive character. In Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin [8] the distinctive concept of postcoloniality is also curiously syncretized to the notion of neo-colonialism, whereby post-colonial states were often tied to former colonial administrative, legal and economic systems, which limited their independent action, as this effectively allowed the continued control of many of these states in the period after independence [8]. In this study, the postcolonial state refers to a state with colonialism-induced perturbations that constitute current threats to human progress in the new state.

Consequently, the analytical framework of postcoloniality is fully distinct from the framework of postcolonialism. Under the later, a direct or indirect influence of the former colonial lord is still prevalent in the domestic and even international relations of the erstwhile colony. On the other hand, postcoloniality refers to certain specificities of disorder induced by the incidence of colonialism. We illustrate this with the forceful amalgamation by colonialism of disparate ethnic entities into new nation-states, as demonstrable with the Nigerian state's problematic ethnic combinations. Indeed, we agree with Loomba [9] that one of the most intimidating aspects of postcolonial studies is the sheer scope of the subject. In occlusion of this intimidation therefore, we contend that postcoloniality cannot for instance, cease to be a relevant perspective of social science investigation, after only fifty years of independence (as in the current Nigerian status).

2. 3. E-Democracy

But what is democracy? A profound interrogation of e-democracy must commence with a strong definition of democracy. However, according to Idike [10] the definition of democracy has continued to defy all attempted propositions of common understanding. Yet, the UN Economic and Social Council [11] has highlighted as follows:

> Democracy, as defined in Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org), in its ideal sense is the notion that the people should have control of the government ruling over them. This ideal is pursued by implementing a system of voting such that the majority of people rule, either directly or indirectly, through elected representatives. Democracies may therefore be 'liberal', where fundamental rights of individuals in the minority are protected by law, or they may be 'illiberal' where they are not. Democracy is often implemented as a form of government in which policy is decided by the preference of the real majority (as opposed to a partial or relative majority of the demos/citizens) in a decision-making process, usually elections or referenda, open to all.

Indeed, the above conceptualization of democracy begins to fully relate positively with the concerns of this study. We therefore underscore the notion that the people should have control of the government ruling over them. We further stress that this majoritarian rule may further be through the elected representatives of the people. Finally on this score, we still amplify the question of the preference of the real majority in policy decisions. Then what is e-democracy? In the words of Chadwick [12] e-democracy is simpler to describe than it is to realize. And we opine that it is never trouble-free to describe e-democracy. Hence, we agree that there is actually, no single definition for e-democracy. But it can broadly be described as

the use of new Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) to increase and enhance citizens' engagement in democratic processes [13]. Early attempts involved 2-way cable television (1970s) and Teletext (1980s). However, the emergence of the World Wide Web in the 1990s led to the rise of e-democracy in its current form [13]. Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology [13] further states:

> Traditionally, e-democracy initiatives have been categorized as follows, although the boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred: a) top-down: initiatives by the government, or local authorities, often with the goals of lowered costs, or increased efficiency, transparency and convenience; b) bottom-up: initiated by citizens and activists at the grassroots level. These generally aim to increase transparency, accountability or convenience as well as to inform, educate and campaign. In each category, activities can be either: 1) one-way processes: such as dissemination of information from the government to citizen: 2) two-way processes: such as public opinion polls, or consultation on draft bills.

According to Coleman & Norris [14], e-democracy is a means for disseminating more political information and for enhancing communication and participation, as well as hopefully in the long run, for the transformation of the political debate and the political culture…It covers those arrangements by which electronic communications are used by those with power and the citizens they serve, to interact with each other in order to inform and modify the way that power is used [14]. E-democracy is anything that governments do to facilitate greater participation in government using digital or electronic means [14]. Furthermore, a conceptual synonym of e-democracy is e-government, which the World Bank [15] in [16] defines in these terms:

> The use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions.

We draw attention in the above definition, to the issue of transformation of relations with citizens and also, the critical subject matter of better delivery of services. E-government has also been described as follows:

> The concept of e-government espouses two aspects: (a) e-readiness, which is the generic capacity or aptitude of the public sector to use information and communications technology (ICT) for encapsulating in public services and deploying to the public, high quality information (explicit knowledge) and effective communication tools that support human development; and (b) e-participation, which refers to the willingness on the part of government, to use ICT to provide high quality information (explicit knowledge) and effective communication tools for the specific purpose of empowering

people to participate in consultations and decision-making, both in their capacity as consumers of public services and as citizens [11].

We further underscore in this conceptualization, the dual aspects of e-readiness and e-participation to which we shall subsequently return in this study. It has also been suggested that e-democracy means the utilization of electronic communications technologies, such as the Internet, in enhancing democratic processes within a democratic republic or representative democracy [11]. Furthermore, a particularly spectacular genre of the internet facility, which is democratic in its tendencies and potentialities is the social media, which is essentially, a collectivity of community-based platforms for members' contacts, members' contributions, collaborations and content-sharing activities. Facebook and Twitter are among the most popular tributaries of the social media. E-democracy is actually still an emerging tendency and a central problematique of this study is its implications for democratic culture in the postcolony.

3. ASSESSING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN NIGERIA: A CONCISE ACCOUNT

A critical aspect of this study is an assessment of the performance of Nigeria's National Assembly, particularly since the country's return to the path of democracy, after prolonged periods of military administration, spanning the period 1966-1999 (with intermittent tolerance of civilian dispensations by the military). In this regard, it has been posited that the Upper House of the Nigerian National Parliament that sat from 3 June 1999 to 29 May 2007 produced only financial scandals as well as leadership crises, as major defining attributes [17]. According to Banjo [17]:

> We submit that whenever the history and politics of Nigeria's Fourth Republic are examined/re-examined, the Senate will face a rather critical review for some unparliamentary attributes. This has been the consequence of an intra-elite struggle over resources, within the National Assembly and national politics as a whole. This singular factor has no doubt weakened the capacity of the Nigerian people's representatives in the Upper House, to impact positively on the governance process from 3 June, 1999 to 29 May, 2007. Finally, the problem of poor representation by the parliamentarian has become a central issue and a growing headache in African politics and public life, and must be tackled as a major problem, or else it becomes a permanent legacy. The hidden cost is unthinkable if the institutions that should serve as bridge between the state and the citizens are made up of people who by means of greed seek only to undercut people's hopes and aspirations.

Joshua and Oni [18] have also undertaken a detailed assessment of Nigeria's Federal House of Representatives, (the second arm of the National Assembly) on susceptibility to corruption (between 1999 and 2011).

At the end of the study, they (Joshua and Oni) concluded that not only was the House weak in making laws (to check the menace of corruption in the period covered by their study) but that the legislative body itself (was in the particular period) truly neck-deep in corruption.

They opined that it had become abundantly clear from their analysis that corruption had greatly eroded the moral value of the Nigerian state, especially at the level of governance. Equally, they posited, the Federal House of Representatives as it was then constituted, lacked the moral fiber to champion anti-corruption crusades in the country as they had turned themselves, to vampires, feeding fat on the economy at the expense of the masses.

Joshua and Oni actually adduced enormous evidence for their conclusions. Furthermore, in an assessment of the Seventh National Assembly that ended in June 2015, Ugwuanyi [19] summarized the performance of the Assembly as bordering on low output, despite huge costs to the country. Indeed, Nigerians have always held their national parliament in deep suspicion. It is however possible that the role of the National Assembly in a democratic dispensation is yet to be fully appreciated by Nigerians, probably emanating from the fact that the legislature was not in place in those long, turbulent periods of military (mis)governance in their country.

In any case, there is further evidence of what borders on a representative chasm between the voters and members of the National Assembly in Nigeria. Hence, in the politics of *share the money,* that has become part of the elite worldview in Nigeria; the National Assembly is seen by the voters as a grand institutional felon.

For instance, in the course of this study, in the midst of self-evident national cash-crises and sundry hardships experienced by the Nigerian underclass; endless unearthing of financial perfidies perpetrated by certain officials of the out-gone government of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the Nigerian Senate decided to spend the sum of N4.9 billion, to purchase exotic vehicles for its members. T

hen to circumvent an extant policy on the purchase of such cars for its members, the Nigerian Senate says the 120 cars it ordered for were for the work of the legislators, as committee members. In the meantime, under the government's subsisting monetization policy, in which political office holders are to receive 250 per cent of their annual basic salary as motor vehicle loan, each of the one hundred and nine Nigerian Senators is believed to have already been availed N5.07 million [20].

And as soon as the Senate is done with its own purchases, the House of Representatives is highly likely to embark on a similar brand of representation and the representative crater between the legislators and their electors would continue to widen. In fact, there is a widely held public view in Nigeria that a substantial part of the nation's commonwealth is expended in taking care of the federal legislators [19].

Added to this is the belief that despite the stupendous sums the lawmakers appropriate unto themselves, their output has "woefully and annoyingly failed to measure up" [19].

Becoming a member of the National Assembly in Nigeria therefore may signify any of the following: endless availability of public funds at the lawmaker's disposal for his/her participation in looting such national resources or further legislative pedestal for an incessantly thieving public servant to operate above the laws of the land.

4. E-DEMOCRACY AND THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY: THE CURRENT CHALLENGES

In the days of full-blown and dehumanizing colonialism in Africa, public opinion was a major weapon of the onslaught against the colonialists, by the increasingly educated natives.

The press was the foremost platform for the articulation and expression of this public position/opposition. Currently, colonialism as in the subjugation of the natives by metropolitan forces has ostensibly been defeated. However, the postcolonial consequences of a society bifurcated into *they and us* has continued to characterize the voter-representative agency in the postcolony. Thus, the representative in the postcolonial era chooses what to be told by the people he represents in parliament. It has in this regard, further been stated that internal colonization occurs where the dominant part of a country treats a group or region as it might a foreign colony [8].

An apposite analogy is when a national institution treats the citizens of the nation with antagonism. The dominant segment of the country in this instance becomes the legislature. In this regard therefore, the collectivity of representatives in the Nigerian postcolony (it seems) has developed the tendency to treat their constituents as denizens of a foreign territory.

This invariably brings us face to face with an epic contradiction between agency, representation and the rights of the domestic underclass, in an era of increasing internationalization of the tenets of good governance. It strongly reechoes the question: can the subaltern speak? [21]. Is the voice of the non-legislator (the voter) only locatable in parliamentary representation? Green [22] in [23] bewails the scenario whereby most of the citizens' democratic experience is reduced to listening and watching professional politicians speaking on their behalf, so much so that the majority of citizens are not decision-makers, but spectators who relate to politics with their eyes. The citizens are accordingly also permitted to encounter democracy with their ears but no longer with their voice or their votes. The votes have become petals of electoral rituals.

Indeed, there appears to be this sacrosanct brand of institutionalism in the Nigerian National Assembly that contradicts the current global revolution in information and communications technology (ICT) and in the process, some level of immobility is introduced to service delivery in the country. The alternative that must be considered highly effectual is engaged governance.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council [11] defines engaged governance as a governance-strategy that links citizens, more directly into the decision-making process of the State, in order to enable them to influence the public policies and programmes, in a manner that impacts more positively on their social and economic lives. Thus, the internet, particularly the social media content, provides the veritable platform for the functionality of social capital, which is critical in engaged governance. Citing the World Bank [24], the United Nations Economic and Social Council [11] says this about social capital:

> Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions that underpin a society; it is the glue that holds them together. Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness, that arise from them…Social capital consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding and shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible.

We argue that the most modern mechanism of engendering e-democracy in contemporary governance is the internet, which is a sub-set of the revolutionary Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Citing other sources [25-31], Freeman & Quirke [32], conclude that the potential benefits from transparent e-participation practices include, for example, increasing government legitimacy, added value to decision making, improving civic satisfaction and trust with political processes. They add that such benefits cannot be achieved without governments' trialing of new forms of democratic involvement. Furthermore, the social media is a highly animated section of the internet. The activities on this front is evident of the conclusion that the world has truly become a global community. In addition:

> The importance of e-government projects is not deniable, where more and more countries are utilizing the Internet to open doors for communication and collaboration with their citizens. The Internet is an open channel that encourages people to be active participants in the political arena, and especially disadvantaged segments of society. Based on this, most countries of the world are embracing e-government projects [33-35].

Citing Coleman & Blumler [36], Eggers [37] and Wong & Welch [38], Freeman & Quirke [32] further opine that prospects of e-government have been idealized as heralding a new era of democratic involvement, with opportunities for unmediated discussions, direct participation and representation, and greater transparency and accountability through political openness. But it is not a matter of mere imaginations. E-democracy is suited for such opportunities. It therefore needs to be highlighted to public servants everywhere (national legislators in this context), that the social media is the most potent civil society mechanism, (ever invented) for checking the excesses of men in government. It is not subject to legislative outlawing, except if the particular set of lawmakers (and law enforcers) in a given country, are interested in attracting international odium for their political system and casting local doubts on the legitimacy of their individual democratic qualifications.

The highly revered members of Nigeria's successive National Assemblies have seemingly been proving to be increasingly unaware of the anachronism in the bifurcated agency models of representation. For instance, the Assembly Members have continued to indicate an unawareness that in their constitutionally designated oversight functions (on the duties of the executive) there is likely to be nothing in the statutes that prevents the citizens from playing complementary roles. In this regard, it has further been posited as follows:

> With the Internet, traditional institutions, and especially democratic institutions that contribute to government, for instance assemblies, voting, etc. tend to be highly transformed. The notion of political representation, which has been rendered necessary because of the difficulties to communicate, tends, more and more often, to be substituted by stakeholders, which can be non-governmental organizations, private societies, associations, etc. As a consequence, the general architecture that corresponds to the new social landscape is no longer hierarchical, neither circular nor "starred", but meshed, because connections are more or less randomly created between institutions, as required, no longer with geographical, moral or legal constraints [39].

In an era of e-democracy therefore, the legislature must accept the realities of modern functionalism. We highlight that actually, the most potent danger to democracy in Nigeria is kleptocracy. It is not what the legislator may view as libelous distractions (by the underclass). According to Ugwuanyi [19], the money that Nigeria channels into funding only its legislature has continued to widen the gap between the federal lawmakers and the people they are supposed to represent. Nigerian legislators are classified as the highest paid group of law makers in the world [40]. A senator in Nigeria earns 240 million naira (about 1.7 million US dollars) in salaries and allowances and a member of the House of Representatives earns 204 million naira (about 1.45million US dollars) per annum [40]. In the United States of America, a Senator earns 174,000 US dollars and in the United Kingdom, a Member of parliament about 64,000 US dollars a year [40].

Actually, the level of elite looting of the public treasury in Nigeria is so incredibly gargantuan, whereby as a matter of facts and records, a culture of elite thieving has become a national pastime. Let us call it corruption – political corruption. Ajie and Oyegun [41] consequently declare that political corruption occurs when politicians and political decision-makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish, and implement the laws on behalf of the people, are themselves corrupt. It also takes place when policy formulation and legislation are tailored to benefit politicians and legislators [41]. In the specific context of this study, the beleaguered citizens concluded that the legislators who intend to gag the social media are the kleptomaniacal members of the legislature. The masses on the social media, accordingly mobilized for a classic confrontation with the legislators.

Truly, it appears curious that at a time of daily revelations [42] on how the Nigerian political elite exhibit contempt for financial accountability and probity, the National Assembly is only debating some libel-impeding bills. Is it not on the other hand, a time for the elector and the elected, to leverage on the remaining resources of the state, to make major reinventions in defence of democracy? It is opined in this study that the nature of laws that require urgent enactments in our case-study country are the types that would impede the propensity of the elite to convert national resources to their own private ownership and domestic usages. It is in other words, a time for the reinvention of democracy in the country. It is also a time to embrace the beauty of e-democracy. The alternative scenario is a defeat of democracy – an apparently undesirable contemplation. It is a challenge to the National Assembly in Nigeria.

5. THE ABSOLUTISM IN DEMOCRACY

Indeed, when democracy is denoted as government of the people, it is in absolute terms. The institutions of democracy are accordingly the creations of the people. Invariably, such institutions cannot make laws to gag the people. The profound danger in the attempt to make such laws is that it may become an invitation to the people (by such deviant lawmakers) to mobilize against the occupants of such legislative positions. It therefore becomes a sad day for democracy and democratization, when representation turns into domestic hegemony. The idea of democracy it has been pointed out [43] had come a long way before it was given its first modern forms in the liberal ideas of the 17th and 18th centuries. Now the premises of this hierarchical and representative political system are crumbling, and we must seriously consider the need to revitalize democracy [43].

E-democracy is an opportunity for the revitalization or reinvention of democracy. Incidentally, the Nigerian National Assembly appears to be deficient in e-readiness and equally distrusful of e-participation. It is this deficit that has morphed into a different pattern of readiness (to muzzle internet usage). Invariably, the legislature's distrust of e-participation is a function of an institutional defect in e-readiness. As a matter of fact, elected officials must navigate a communication environment that is significantly more complex than that of just a decade ago [44] in [45]. Furthermore, although new technologies do not translate into concrete political outcomes, they supply new resources by which political actors change the operation of the political system in fundamental ways [45].

Hence, an attempt to encroach on the citizens' rights to utilize the internationalized freedom of speech opportunities, embedded in the social media by a national assembly anywhere, borders on representative turpitude. It is suggestive of both incapacity and unwillingness of elected officials to heed to the voices of their electors [23]. It is also not politically sagacious. The Internet does promote political communication [45]. Laouris [46] therefore adds that, in the grand challenges towards reengineering or even reinventing democracy, the first challenge demands that everybody who is a stakeholder in a situation must have the right to participate in any dialogue, deliberation, or decision on matters that are of concern to him or her. In reinventing democracy in the postcolonial state therefore, the legislature may (for instance) use the channel of the Internet (the social media) to gauge the mood of the various ethnic groups, which were forcefully fused together in a new ostensible nation.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As Soyinka [47] has remonstrated, to deprive a people of volition in their own political direction is to turn a nation into a colony of slaves. To attempt to reinvent slavery, moreso by a national legislature, is considered completely curious in this study. The postcolony must not degenerate to such a society of slaves. Citizens must have the power to shape the reality they perceive [22]. In fact, the Internet and e-democracy present one way to positively redefine democratic processes and reinvigorate the relationship between citizens and their elected representatives [14].

Furthermore, governments around the world are incorporating more and more information and communications technologies' tools into their government activities. And the use of these tools has resulted in the adoption of many e-government visions and strategies [16]. It is therefore not a time for any public institution, particularly the second arm of government in any democratic jurisdiction, to begin to contemplate an action against a genre of the internet. Indeed, the rights of the citizens under e-democracy must be safeguarded, as it guarantees the critically expected reinvention of democracy. For the legislature, it becomes a time to accept modern functionalism, cultivate e-readiness and become e-participants in the democratic processes.

The people remain the mountain. The legislature may be anything. The legislature moves to the mountain. This is the least that is required of the National Assembly in Nigeria. It is also the members' generic challenge.

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